

# TRUE STORY



Tommy came up with his own tricks, since he can't watch other skaters and copy them.

## Vocabulary

**Braille:** a system of writing that uses raised dots, allowing the blind to read by touch

**frustrated:** feeling helpless or disappointed

**confidence:** belief in oneself



**VIDEO:** Watch Tommy skate and talk with Tony Hawk.

[www.scholastic.com/actionlink](http://www.scholastic.com/actionlink)

# Skating Blind

**Action** asked Tony Hawk, “Who inspires you?” He said, “Tommy Carroll.” Tommy can’t see. But he’s an amazing skateboarder.

Whoosh! Tommy Carroll, 17, is airborne. He lands perfectly on his skateboard, and then continues cruising up and down the half-pipe. At his local skate park near Chicago, Illinois, Tommy is renowned for his inventive skating. He does tricks that might never occur to other skaters. He has a style all his own.

There’s a reason for that. Tommy can’t watch and imitate other skaters. He’s blind. As a baby, he had cancer in his eyes, which were removed and replaced with plastic ones.

Tommy recognizes people by their voices. For schoolwork, he uses **Braille** and a laptop with audio features. Being blind hasn’t prevented him from leading a fulfilling life.

## Not Always Easy

Still, Tommy has faced difficulties. He loves sports; as a kid, he ran, swam, and biked—with guides to assist him. But karate class presented an obstacle. When he became skilled enough for advanced

lessons, he wasn’t offered the opportunity to take them. The teachers were afraid Tommy would be injured.

In elementary school, Tommy became **frustrated** during recess. He wanted to participate in football games, but his friends were uncertain about how to include him. Frequently, he was left out entirely.

## On His Own

Tommy was strong, fast, and agile. However, in order to play most sports, he required assistance from others. In sixth grade, he discovered that skateboarding was an exception. “It was something I could do

Tommy enjoys skateboarding because he can do it without help.



## Editor’s Note From Tony Hawk

A while back, someone sent me a news story about Tommy Carroll. He’s blind, and he learned to skateboard totally on his own. I arranged a time to meet him. He’s really good! He really is an inspiration to the kids in his high school. Everybody is amazed at the things he can do.



individually,” he explains.

Tommy went to the local skate park, spending hours there each day. He walked around it, and then skated one part at a time—eventually creating a map of the skate park in his mind. As he skated, the changing sound of his wheels indicated his position on each ramp.

Tommy fell often, but he wasn’t discouraged. He mastered tricks like the nose pivot—turning on the very front of the board. His **confidence** increased along with his skill.

## Dreams Come True

As a serious skater, Tommy desired two things—to join the team of a skateboard company, and to skate with his favorite pro skateboarder, Tony Hawk.

The summer after seventh grade, Tommy met Rob Busch, who owns a company called

Tommy got to meet his favorite pro skateboarder, Tony Hawk!



Agent Skateboards. Rob invited Tommy to join Agent’s team, and Tommy accepted. Tommy received free T-shirts and skateboards from Agent. In return, he skated in shows to promote the company.

In ninth grade, Tommy’s other wish became a reality. Rob called him and said, “Guess who wants to skate with you? Tony Hawk!” Tony had been impressed by a video of Tommy skating. They soon met

and skated together, and Tony interviewed Tommy on video for his Web site, shredordie.com. “It was awesome,” Tommy remembers.

## Fast Forward

Today, Tommy is a senior in high school. He runs track and plays drums in a popular local band. He’s also considering a career in journalism. He has some experience; he once interviewed Tony Hawk on his school’s radio station. “I had an hour-long talk show,” he recalls with satisfaction. “We got more phone calls than any other radio show at the school.”

Next year, Tommy will go to college. He’ll face new challenges there, but he regards them with his customary calm assurance. “I know that if I put my mind to any activity, there’s a way to figure it out,”

Tommy says.

—Christy Damio



Tommy enjoys an afternoon of skating with his sister, Shannon.

